



THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

A high-quality education system that prepares all students for college, career, and life.

March 4, 2016

Dr. Mark Emmert, President
National Collegiate Athletic Association
700 W. Washington Street
P.O. Box 6222
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222

Dear President Emmert:

Washington state law affirms that the purpose of a high school diploma is to declare a student ready for success in post-secondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship. In support of this commitment, the state has embarked on a serious effort to increase the rigor of high school coursework.

Our Legislature has recently increased both the number and types of credits required to earn a high school diploma. Additionally, our state has adopted rigorous 'career and college-ready' standards in core subjects like math, English language arts, and science to ensure that content offered in high school is connected to the expectations of our post-secondary institutions.

As part of these efforts, Washington state has been deeply engaged in a multi-state project called Core to College. The project focuses on how higher education systems could support K-12 in implementing more rigorous learning standards. The work in Washington involved educators in K-12 and higher education collaborating to develop a first-of-its-kind agreement for Washington institutions of higher education to accept Smarter Balanced assessment scores for placement into college credit-bearing courses. Our hope is that this agreement will help cut post-secondary remediation rates dramatically over the next decade, especially for students entering our community and technical college system.

Our success thus far has been the result of positive collaborations among the leading education governance bodies in Washington State, and we are requesting that you partner with us to ensure the success of another important initiative: strengthening senior year course-taking through transition *Bridge to College* courses in math and English.

The *Core to College* project developed these transition courses specifically to prepare seniors for the rigors of college coursework. These courses, developed with the help of college and university math and English professors, were designed for students not yet ready for credit-bearing college-level coursework, based on their assessment scores. The transition course provides them an opportunity to get college-ready as seniors and avoid the cost and time of remedial coursework after entering college. In many schools, given the significantly higher academic standards we have implemented, this can easily describe over half the student population.

A growing number of Washington institutions of higher education (including all of the state's community colleges) have agreed to place students with a "B" grade in these courses directly into college credit-bearing

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courses. Additionally, the Washington State Board of Education recognizes the courses as meeting core credit graduation requirements.

Our concerns stem from the fact that school districts have notified us that the NCAA has initially rejected these courses when determining the eligibility of student athletes. We feel that the NCAA may feel differently if given the chance to learn some of the history and purpose of these courses, in the broader context of our aggressive campaign to increase rigor and bolster the college-readiness of our high school students. Rejection of these courses as core courses by the NCAA presents significant logistical concerns for school districts. These courses are offered in over 114 high schools this year, serving roughly 4,000 students. We expected those numbers to double next year. Now, students who see themselves as potential Division I athletes are dis-enrolling as we speak, despite the significant potential advantage these courses provide for their educational pathway.

We would like to invite the NCAA to work with key education agency staff leading the *Bridge to College* project to consider these course frameworks on a statewide rather than on a school-by-school basis. If the NCAA finds there are content issues with the courses that prevent the Association from approving them, we invite you to work with these staff to identify the issues and address them. We know we share the same goal: hold high standards for all students, and offer courses that specifically prepare students for the next step in their educational journey.

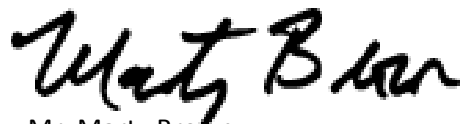
Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn would invite a phone call from you to discuss next steps in this process. Alternatively, Dr. Bill Moore, Director for K-12 Partnerships from our State Board for Community and Technical Colleges is the staff lead on the *Bridge to College* project and could be contacted by your staff about potential next steps.

Our academic rigor has never been higher in Washington. The *Bridge to College* courses are an integral part of our plan to prepare all students for success in post-secondary education and life. Thank you for partnering in this historic effort.


Sincerely,



Mr. Randy Dorn
State Superintendent
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction



Mr. Marty Brown
Executive Director
State Board of Community and Technical Colleges



Gene Sharratt, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Washington Student Achievement Council



Mr. Ben Rarick
Executive Director
Washington State Board of Education